

Player

JOHN CHIANG

Position: **Controller of California**

Elected: **2006**

Previous job: **member,
California Board of
Equalization**

John Chiang has an obscure job that mainly involves serving in the role of state accountant. But he's used his leverage as Controller to become a rising force in the California Democratic Party and a leading nemesis of Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Amid a severe state budget shortfall, Chiang refused to accept the governor's orders to cut the pay of state employees to the federal minimum wage and to furlough many of them. Chiang essentially won on wages, but a court rebuffed him on the furlough issue.

Chiang emerged from those fights hailed by some as a friend of workers; Schwarzenegger accuses him of pandering

to unions for political gain. But Chiang has made some politically difficult decisions. He delayed welfare checks and tax refunds earlier this year, saying the state didn't have the cash.

All of this has lent unlikely prominence to the baby-faced son of Taiwanese immigrants, a career tax lawyer and tax administrator. Chiang's rise is worth watching because California Democrats have a lot of power, but they don't have a lot of youth. Attorney General Jerry Brown, 70, and Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, 64, are the party's leading contenders for governor in 2010. If he plays his cards right, the 46-year-old Chiang could represent the future of the California Democratic Party.

—Josh Goodman